

## CAN SOLDIERS BE CHRISTIANS?<sup>1</sup>

BY MARTIN LUTHER.<sup>2</sup>

OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

IN order to give counsel so far as in our power to weak, timid, and doubtful consciences, and to furnish better instruction to the reprobate, I have composed this treatise. For he who fights with a good and well-instructed conscience can indeed fight well; since it cannot fail that where there is a good conscience there is also good courage and a bold heart, and where the heart is bold and the courage assured there is the fist the stronger and both man and mount the more spirited, and all things turn out better, and all chances and affairs lead the more easily to the victory, which accordingly God grants.

On the contrary, where the conscience is timid and hesitating neither can the heart have the right boldness. For it cannot fail that an evil conscience makes cowardly and fearful; and thus it follows that man and steed are slack and unfit, and no plan succeeds, and all finally succumb.

As for those rough and reckless consciences which are found

<sup>1</sup>Literally the title of this pamphlet, which appeared in 1526, is "Whether Soldiers Can Be Saved," but the modern shifting of theological emphasis seems to favor the title above used. The direct occasion for the writing of it was a request for an answer to this question, presented to Luther by a nobleman of Brunswick, Assa von Kram. Lucas Cranach, the painter, a personal friend of Luther, presented a copy of the pamphlet without the author's name to Duke George of Saxony, one of the bitterest enemies of Luther and the Reformation. After reading it Duke George said; "You are always boasting of your Wittenberg monk, how he is the only scholar and the only one who can talk good German and write good books, but you are wrong here as in other matters. Here is a book that is indeed good and better than anything Luther could ever make." But when Cranach gave him a copy of the book with Luther's name as author, the Duke was vexed and exclaimed: "It is too bad that such an abominable monk should have made such a good book." The pamphlet is here abridged.

Luther treated the same problems to some extent in the writings: "Of Civil Authority, and How Far We Owe Obedience to it;" "An Admonition to Peace, in Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Suabia;" "Against the Murderous and Robbing Bands of Peasants;" and in letters to Chancellor Müller and the Saxon princes.

<sup>2</sup>Translated from the German by Prof. W. H. Carruth of the University of Kansas.

in every company, whom we call madcaps and daredevils, with them all goes headlong whether they win or lose. For whatever befalls those who have good or bad consciences, the same befalls these rough fellows because they are part of the company. No victory comes through them, for they are the shells and not the kernel of the army. Accordingly I send forth this instruction, according to the light that God has given me, so that those who wish to wage war righteously may not lose God's grace and the life everlasting, but may know how to arm and inform themselves.

#### OF OFFICE AND PERSON.

In the first place let us consider the distinction, that office and person, deed and doer, are two different things; for an office or work may be good and proper in itself, but evil and wrong if the person or doer is not good and right, or does it in a wrong spirit. The office of judge is a precious and divine office, whether it be that of the trial judge or the executioner. But if any one assumes it without authority, or one who has authority performs it for gold or favor, it ceases to be good and right. Thus also the state of matrimony is precious and divine, nevertheless there is many a rogue and knave in it. So it is with the soldier's estate, office or work, which in itself is right and divine. But we are to look to it that the person who fills it is the same, and upright, as we shall hear.

In the second place I must explain that I am not talking this time of the righteousness that makes people pleasing to God. For that comes from faith in Jesus Christ alone, without any work or merit of ours, given and granted from the pure mercy of God; but I am talking of outward righteousness such as is meant in connexion with offices and works, that is, to speak plainly in the matter, I am treating here the question: Whether the Christian faith, through which we are accounted pleasing to God, can permit that I be a soldier, wage war, slay and stab, rob and burn, as one does to his enemy according to the usages of war; whether this work is sin or wrong and concerns one's conscience toward God; or whether a Christian is bound to do none of these works, but only do good and love, and never slay or harm any one. I call this an office or work, which, though it were divine and right in itself, may yet become wrong and evil if the person is wrong and evil.

In the third place, I do not intend here to write at length of the work and office of warfare and how it is right and divine in itself, since I have written amply of that in my booklet "On Civil

Authority." For I might fairly boast that since the time of the apostles the civil sword and authority have never been so clearly described and so finely eulogised as by me, as indeed my enemies have to admit, for which I have earned the honest reward that my doctrine is abused and condemned as seditious and hostile to authority. For which God be praised ! For since the sword is appointed by God to punish the wicked, protect the good, and maintain peace, it is sufficiently proven that warfare and slaying is appointed by God, and all that warfare and justice bring with them. What else is war but punishing wrong and evil ? Why do we fight but to have peace and submission ?

#### WAR AS A WORK OF LOVE.

Now although it does not seem indeed that slaying and robbing is a work of love, whence a simple man may think that it is not a Christian work and beseems not a Christian to do, yet in truth it is after all a work of love. For a good physician, when the disease is so deep and virulent that he has to cut off and destroy hand, foot, eye, or ear in order to save the body, seems, when we consider the limb that he cuts off, a terrible, merciless man, yet considering the body that he thus tries to save, he is in truth an excellent, faithful man, and is doing a good Christian work to the best of his ability. Even so when I consider the work of war, punishing the wicked, slaying wrong doers, and causing so much misery, it seems to be a very un Christian work and directly contrary to Christian love : but when I consider how it protects the good, women and children, homes, property and honor, and sustains and preserves the peace withal, then it appears how precious and divine the work is, and I see that it too cuts off an arm or a leg to save the whole body. For if the sword did not keep the peace and prevent, riot would needs ruin everything in the world. Therefore such a war is nothing else than a small and brief breach of the peace to prevent a long and limitless breach of the peace, a small misfortune to prevent a great one.

All that is said and written about the war being a great curse is true ; but at the same time people ought to consider how much greater is the curse that is prevented by war. To be sure, if people were good and willingly kept the peace, wars would be the greatest curse on earth. But what will you do with the fact that the world is wicked, that people will not keep the peace, but rob, steal, kill, abuse women and children, and take honor and property ? This general and universal breach of the peace, which leaves

no man safe, must be checked by the little breach of the peace that is called war, or the sword. Thence doth God honor the sword so highly that he calls it His own ordinance, and will not have it said or thought that men invented or ordained it. For the hand that wields this sword and slays with it is no longer the hand of man, but the hand of God, and it is not man, but God, who hangs, breaks, beheads, slays, and makes war : all is His work and His decree. In short, we must not consider in the work of war how it slays, burns, strikes, and captures, etc., for this is what the half-open child-eyes do, which see in the physician only how he cuts off the hand or saws off the leg, but do not observe that it is to save the whole body. Even so we must view the work of war or the sword with grown-up eyes, considering the reason why it so slays and does such dreadful deeds, whence it will appear of itself that it is an office in itself as divine and as necessary and useful to the world as eating and drinking or any other work.

#### THE ABUSE OF WAR.

But that some abuse the office, and slay and beat without cause, from mere wantonness, is not the fault of the office, but of the person. For where was ever an office, work or anything whatever, which wanton men do not abuse? They are like mad physicians who might propose to cut off a sound hand without cause and from mere wantonness. They are a part of that general lack of peace which must be prevented by righteous war and sword, and forced to peace, as indeed it always happens and has happened that those are beaten who begin war without cause. For in the end they cannot escape God's judgment, that is, his sword ; it finds and strikes them finally.

And think for thyself, if we conceded that war were wrong itself, we would needs concede everything, and let wrong go. For if the sword were wrong in fighting, it would also be wrong when it punishes evil-doers and keeps the peace. And in brief all its functions would be wrong. For what else is proper warfare than punishing evil-doers and keeping the peace. When we punish a thief, a murderer, or an adulterer, that is punishing a single evil-doer. But in a proper war, we punish all at once a whole great company of evil-doers, who do evil in proportion as the company is great. Now if one function of the sword is good and right, they are all right and good, for it is a sword, indeed, and not a fox-tail, and its name is the wrath of God.

## CHRISTIANS FIGHT AS CITIZENS.

To the objection that is made, that Christians have no command to fight, and that examples are not enough, because they have the teaching of Christ that they should not resist evil but endure everything, I have made sufficient reply in the pamphlet "On Civil Authority." For indeed Christians do not fight, nor have civil authority among themselves, for their government is a spiritual government, and according to the spirit they are subject to no one but Christ. But yet as to their bodies and property they are subject to the civil authority, and bound to be obedient. If then they are summoned by the civil authority to combat, they are to fight and must fight from obedience, not as Christians but as members of the whole and as obedient subjects according to the body and temporal goods. Therefore when they fight they do not do it for themselves, nor on their own account, but in the service and under the orders of the authorities under whom they are placed.

To sum it all up: The office of the sword is in itself right and a divine and useful institution, which God does not wish to see despised, but feared, honored and followed, for He beareth not the sword in vain. For He hath ordained two sorts of government among men, one spiritual, by the word and without the sword, whereby men are to become acceptable and righteous, so that through this righteousness they may attain eternal life, and this righteousness he administers through the word, which he has entrusted to the preachers. The other is a civil government by the sword, so that those who are not willing to become acceptable and righteous unto eternal life through the word may nevertheless be constrained by this civil government to be righteous and acceptable before the world, and this sort of righteousness he administers by the sword. And although he does not propose to reward this sort of righteousness with eternal life, yet he desires to have it in order that there may be peace among men, and rewards it with temporal goods. For on this account does he give to authority so much property, honor, and power, which it possesses justly above others, that it may serve him in administering this civil authority. Therefore God himself is the founder, lord, master, promoter and rewarder of both sorts of justice, of both spiritual and civil, and there is no human institution or power about them, but the matter is all divine.

## OF THREE SORTS OF PERSONS IN WAR.

Next we will speak of righteousness in war, or the fashion of war as far as persons are concerned. In the first place, war may be waged by three sorts of persons. One, when an equal makes war upon an equal, that is, when neither of the two parties is pledged or subject to the other, without regard to whether the one is as great, lordly or mighty as the other. Again, when a superior makes war upon an inferior; and last, when an inferior makes war upon a superior.

## OF SUBJECTS' WARRING AGAINST SOVEREIGNS.

Let us take up the third case first. Here stands the law and says that no one should contend nor fight against his superior, for we owe to the authorities obedience, honor and respect. And he who strikes upward receives the chips in his eyes, or as Solomon says, He who throws stones into the air will find them falling back upon his own head. This is the law in brief, established by God and accepted by men. For there is no combining the ideas of obedience and opposition, of being a good subject and yet refusing to tolerate a master.

The heathen, knowing nothing of God, and not perceiving that civil government is instituted by God (but they regarded it as the work and benefit of men), went boldly at this matter and considered it not merely just but commendable to depose, slay or expel useless and wicked rulers. Hence it came that the Greeks by public decrees offered jewels and presents to tyrannicides, that is, those who should stab or dispose of a tyrant.

But such examples are not satisfactory for us. For we do not ask here what the heathen did, but what it is right and proper to do, not merely spiritually before God, but also in the divine and outward order of the civil government. For even though to day or to-morrow some people should rise and depose or slay their ruler, well, it would be done, and rulers must expect it if God so wills. But it does not follow from that, that it would be just and right. No instance has ever come to my notice when it would be just, neither can I now imagine one.

## OF DEPOSING INSANE OR TYRANNICAL SOVEREIGNS.

It is indeed proper, if a king, prince, or ruler should become insane, that he be deposed and taken into custody. For such a one



is no longer to be regarded as a human being since reason is gone. Yea, sayest thou, a brutal tyrant is also insane, or to be regarded as worse than insane, for he does much more harm. It looks here as if the answer would be difficult. For such an argument is very plausible, and seems to have justice on its side. Nevertheless I will speak my mind, that a madman and a tyrant are two different things. For a madman cannot do or permit anything reasonable, and there is no hope, since the light of reason is gone. But a tyrant adds much to this: he knows when he is doing wrong, and he has conscience and understanding, and there is hope that he may reform, receive advice, learn and follow, which is not the case with the madman, who is like a block or a stone. And behind this is the question of the dangerous consequences and example, so that if it were justified to slay or expel tyrants the custom would soon spread and become a general craze, and they would call those tyrants who are not tyrants, and murder them just as the mob might take a mind to. This is shown us in the Roman annals, where they slew many an excellent emperor merely because he did not suit them, or would not do their will, but let them be the masters and regarded himself as their servant or puppet, as was the case with Galba, Pertinax, Gordian, Alexander and others.

You must not pipe to the populace too much for they are too fond of dancing; it is better to cut them down ten yards than to concede them a handbreath, yea even a finger's breadth in such a case, and better that the tyrants do them wrong a hundred times than that they do wrong to the tyrants once. For if any wrong is to be suffered, it is preferable that it be suffered from the authorities rather than by the authorities at the hands of the subjects. For the populace has and knows no moderation, and there are more than five tyrants in every one of them.

#### OF TOLERATING TYRANTS.

Here thou wilt perchance say: Yea, how is all this to be tolerated from the tyrants; thou yieldest them too much, and their wickedness will only become stronger and stronger by such teachings. Shall we endure it that everybody's wife and child, person and property shall be in such danger and shame? Who will undertake anything decent if we are to live thus? To this I answer: I am not teaching thee, who wilt do what suits thy whim and pleasure; go, follow thy desire and slay all thy rulers, and see how thou thrive. I teach only those who really wish to do right. To these I say that the authorities are not to be restrained by crime or sedi-

tion, as the Romans, Greeks, Swiss, and Danes have done ; but there are other ways.

In the first place this, when they see that the sovereign esteems his own soul's salvation so lightly that he is brutal and does wrong, what carest thou if he destroys thy property, person, wife and child ? He cannot harm thy soul, and is doing himself more harm than thee, since he is ruining his own soul, whence must follow the ruin of life and property. Thinkest thou not that this is vengeance enough ?

Again, how wouldst thou do if this sovereign were at war, wherein not merely thy property, wife and child, but thou thyself must needs be wrecked, be captured, burned, slain for thy sovereign's sake. Wouldst thou slay thy sovereign for this ? How many fine people Emperor Maximilian lost in battle in the course of his life ! And yet nothing was ever done to him for it, though nothing more shocking would have been heard of if he had slain them arbitrarily. And yet he is the cause of their death ; for on his account they were slain. Now what else is a tyrant and butcher than a dangerous war in which many a fine, honest, innocent man risks his life.

#### OF CONSTITUTIONAL RULERS.

Yea, sayest thou, but what if a king or other ruler bind himself by oath to his subjects to rule them according to certain articles agreed upon, but does not keep it, and accordingly is bound to resign the government ? As for instance, they say that the king of France has to rule in accordance with the parliaments of his realm. Here I answer : It is fine and proper for the sovereign to rule in accordance with laws and to observe them and not follow his own whims. But throw into the consideration that a king vows not only to observe his own local laws and constitution, but that God himself bids him be good and he vows to be so. Now then, if such a king keeps none of these vows, neither the law of God nor of his country, shouldst thou for this attack him, to judge and avenge the same ? Who gave thee warrant thereto ? Some other authority must needs come in between you, to hear you both and condemn the guilty, otherwise thou wilt not escape the judgment of God where he says, " Judgment is mine," and again, " Judge not."

For to be wrong and to punish wrong are two different things. To be right or wrong is common to all, but to dispense wrong and right, belongs to him who is lord of right and wrong, even God



alone, who commits it to the sovereign in his stead. Therefore let no one presume upon this office unless he is certain that he has a warrant therefor from God or from his servant, the sovereign.

If it were to be permitted that every one who was in the right should himself punish him who was in the wrong, what would be the result in the world? The result would be that the servant would slay his master, the maid her mistress, children their parents, pupils their teacher; that would be forsooth a beautiful condition; what need would there be of judges and civil authority instituted by God?

#### SUBMISSION OF THE SUBJECT ABSOLVES NOT THE SOVEREIGN.

But at this point I must give heed and hear my critics who cry: Aha, meseems that is deliberately flattering the princes and rulers; wilt thou too creep to the cross and ask mercy? Art thou afear'd? etc. Well, I will let these hornets buzz and fly past. Whoever can, may better my sermon; I am not preaching this time to princes and rulers. I think indeed this hypocrisy of mine shall win me little favor, nor they have much joy of it, seeing that I put their order into such danger as is said. For I have said elsewhere sufficiently, and it is all too true, that the majority of princes and rulers are godless tyrants and enemies of God, that they persecute the Gospel and are withal my ungracious lords and barons, of whose favor, moreover, I make little account. But this is what I am teaching, that every one should learn how to behave in this matter of the office and relation to his sovereign, and to do what God commands, leaving the sovereign to look to himself and act on his own account; God will not forget the tyrants and sovereigns; he is their match, as he has been from the beginning of the world.

Moreover I do not wish this my message to be taken as applying to peasants alone, as though they alone were subjects, and not the nobility. Not so, but what I say of subjects or inferiors is to apply to all, peasants, citizens, noblemen, counts and princes. For all these have also sovereigns and are themselves subjects of some one else. And as quickly as a rebellious peasant should lose his head, just as quickly should a rebellious nobleman, count or prince lose his, all alike, and no one will be wronged.

#### OF WARFARE BETWEEN EQUALS.

So much for the first branch of the subject, that no contest or warfare against the authorities can be right. And although it often happens and is in daily danger of happening, just as all other mis-

chief and wrong happens where God decrees it and does not prevent, yet the outcome is bad and it goes not unpunished, though for a time they thrive. But now let us take up the second point, whether equals may fight against equals, on which I wish to be understood thus: That it is not right to begin war after the suggestion of every hot-headed ruler. For this I would say first of all, that he who begins a war is wrong, and he deserves to be beaten, or at least punished, who first draws the knife. And indeed it has happened as a rule in all history that those have lost who began a war, and those were seldom beaten who were on the defensive. For civil authority was not instituted by God to break the peace and begin war, but to administer peace and prevent war; as Paul says, that the office of the sword is to defend and to punish, defend the well-disposed in peace and punish the wicked with war. And God, who will not permit wrong, ordains it that war has to be waged upon war-makers; in the language of the proverb, "There was never any so bad but he found a worse," and God has the Psalmist sing "The Lord hath scattered the peoples that delight in war."

#### ONLY DEFENSIVE WARFARE JUSTIFIED.

So have a care, He is not mocked, and take thou good heed that thou put far apart desire and necessity, will and need, desire to make war and will to fight. Let not thyself be aroused, though thou be the Turkish emperor; wait until need and necessity come, apart from will and desire; thou wilt have enough to do withal and get war enough,—wait that thou mayest say and thy heart boast: Good, how gladly would I have peace if only my neighbors were willing. Then canst thou make defence with a good conscience. For then thou hast God's word, "He scattereth the peoples that delight in war." Consider the veteran soldiers who have seen battle; they are not quick to draw, they do not bully and are not anxious to fight; but when they are forced so that they must, then look to thyself; they are not noisy, their weapon is fast in its sheath, but if they have to draw it, it will not be returned without blood. On the other hand, the heedless fools who fight first in thought and make a fine beginning and devour the world in words and are the first to draw the sword, they are the first to flee and to sheathe the sword.

Let this then be the first point under this head, that war is not right, even though equals be pitted against equals, unless it have a claim and conscience such that it can say: My neighbor

crowds and forces me to war; I would gladly avoid it, so that the war might be not merely war but an obligatory protection and defence. For there is a distinction in wars, some being begun from will and desire without any attack by others, some being forced upon the defender by need and constraint after the attack has begun. The first sort may be called wars of aggression, the latter wars of defence. The first are of the Devil, may God grant them no success; the other are a human misfortune, may God help those who have to wage them.

Therefore, my lords, give ear and avoid war unless you are compelled to repress and defend, and your official duty constrains you to make war. But if it does, let it be vigorously and hew away, be men and prove your mettle; it will not do to fight with fancies. The cause will bring with it enough of seriousness, and the wrathful, proud, defiant iron-eaters will find their teeth so dull that they can scarcely bite fresh butter. The reason is this: Every ruler and prince is bound to protect his subjects and give them peace. This is his office, and for this he has the sword. And this is the point on which his conscience is to depend, so that he may know that this function is right in the sight of God and ordained by him. But I am not now teaching what Christians should do. For we Christians have nothing to do with your government; but we serve you and will say what you should do in your government before God. A Christian is a person by himself; he believes for himself and for no one else. But a ruler and prince is not a person by himself, but for others, to serve them, that is, to protect and defend them, although it were well if he were a Christian besides and believed in God, for then he would be blessed. But it is not prince-like to be Christian, wherefore few princes can be Christians, or as the saying goes, A prince is a rare animal in heaven. But even though they be not Christians, yet should they do right and well according to the outward ordinances of God, for this is what he expects of them.

#### OF THE FEAR OF GOD.

So much for the first point in this division. And the next is also to be carefully heeded. Even though thou be sure and certain that thou hast not begun it, but art forced to fight, yet must thou fear God and have Him before thine eyes, and not burst forth with, "Yea, I am forced, I have good reason to fight," and depending on this rush madly in; that will not do either. True it is that thou hast good and righteous cause to fight and defend thyself, but for

all that thou hast not yet seal and compact from God that thou shalt win. Yea, this very presumption might well cause thee to lose, although thou hadst just cause to make war, because God cannot endure pride or presumption, but only those who humble themselves before Him and fear Him. He is well pleased that one should fear neither man nor the Devil but should be bold and defiant, stiff and courageous against them, provided they begin and are wrong. But that then the victory should come as though we ourselves did it or had the power, that will not do, but He must be feared, and wants to hear such a song as this come from the heart: "Dear Lord, my God, thou seest that I must fight; I would gladly keep from it, but I am not counting on the justice of my cause, but on Thy grace and mercy. For I know that if I depended upon the justice of the cause and were defiant, thou mightest fitly let me fall as one deserving to fall, because I depended on my right and not upon Thy mercy and kindness." And hearken here what the heathen, the Greeks and Romans, did in this case, knowing nothing of God and the fear of God. For they believed that they themselves warred and won; but through manifold experiences, wherein often a great and armed force was beaten by a few that were unarmed, they had to learn and frankly confess that in war nothing is more dangerous than to be confident and defiant; and they conclude that one should never despise his foe, be he ever so small. Also that one should surrender no advantage, however small it be,—as though every feature of the matter were to be weighed with the jeweler's scales. Fools and defiant, heedless people, do nothing in war but harm. The phrase *non puttassem*, "I wouldn't have thought it," the Romans considered the most discreditable expression that a soldier could use. For it indicates a self-confident, defiant, careless man, who can destroy more in one moment, with one step, with one word, than ten men can make good, and at the end he will say, I wouldn't have thought it. How terribly did Prince Hannibal defeat the Romans as long as they were defiant and confident toward him. And there are innumerable instances in the past and daily before our eyes.

Now the heathen learned and taught this, but could give no reason or cause, but laid it to Fortune, which nevertheless they could not but fear. But the cause and reason is, as I have said, that God wishes to give evidence in and through all such events that He must be feared, and even in such affairs can nor will not tolerate any defiance, contempt, rashness or self-confidence, until we learn to accept from his hands as pure grace and mercy all that

we wish or are to have. Thence comes a strange thing: a soldier who has a just cause should be at once courageous and fearful. Now how can he fight if he is fearful? And yet if he fights fearlessly he incurs great danger.

Now this is the way of it: before God he should be fearful, timid, and humble, and commend the affair to Him, to ordain it not according to our righteousness but according to his grace and goodness, so that with God in front one may win with an humble and contrite heart. Against men one must be bold, free and defiant, assuming that they are wrong, and so assail them with defiant and confident spirit. For why should not we deal with our God as the Romans, the greatest warriors on earth, did to their false god, Fortune, namely fear Him. And if they did not do it, they fought in great danger or were badly defeated.

Let this, then, be our conclusion on this head: that warfare against one's equal must be waged only under compulsion and in the fear of God. But compulsion means when the enemy or neighbor attacks and begins, and then it does no good to offer justice, or examination, or compromise, to endure and forgive all sorts of abuses and wiles, but he simply goes at you headlong. For I always assume that I am preaching to those who would like to do right in the sight of God; but as for those who will neither offer nor accept justice, they do not concern me.

#### OF SUPERIORS' WARRING ON INFERIORS.

The third question is whether superiors may rightly fight against inferiors. We have already heard how subjects should be obedient and even suffer wrong from their rulers, so that, if matters go rightly, the authorities will have nothing to do towards the subjects but to administer judgment, right and justice; but if they revolt and rebel, it is right and proper to fight against them. Likewise a prince is to proceed against his nobles, the emperor against his princes, if they are rebellious and begin war. But here too it is to be done in the fear of God, and no one may rely too defiantly upon the righteousness of his cause, lest God decree that the rulers be punished by their subjects even with wrong, as has often happened. For being in the right and doing right do not always go together, nay, never do unless God so dispose. Therefore, though it is right that the subjects sit quiet and endure everything, and rebel not, yet is it not within the control of men that they should always do so. For God has placed the inferior person quite alone by himself, taken the sword from him and left him only the



prison. But if in spite of this he forms bands and conspires, seizes the sword and breaks loose, he deserves the judgment and death before God.

The same is to be said of all authorities, that when they turn towards their own superiors they have no more authority but are deprived of it all. When they look downward they are endowed with all authority ; so that finally all authority ends in God, whose alone it is. For He is the emperor, prince, count, noble, judge, and everything, and distributes it as He will among his subjects, and it rises again to Him. Therefore no individual is to oppose the community, nor to win the community to his support. For in so doing he is hewing upwards, and the chips will surely fall back into his eyes. And from this thou seest how those are opposing the ordinance of God who resist the authorities. And at the same time St. Paul says, that God will abolish all rule and all authority and power when He himself shall rule.

#### OF FIGHTING FOR HIRE.

Inasmuch as no king or prince can make war alone, he must have men and forces for it who will serve him, just as he cannot administer courts and laws without having councillors, judges, attorneys, jailers, and executioners and all that goes with a court. If the question is asked whether it is right to take pay, or as it is called, wages or hire, and therefor agree to obligate oneself to serve the prince whenever the time comes, as is customary nowadays, we must make a distinction among the soldiers.

The first case is that of subjects, who are in duty bound anyway to serve their sovereign, to support him with life and property and follow his call, especially the nobles and such as hold fiefs from the sovereign. For the estates which are held by counts, barons, and nobles were of old bestowed by the Romans and the German emperors upon condition that those who held them should be constantly armed and ready, the one with so and so many horses and men, another with so many, according as the estates could furnish ; and these estates were the hire wherewith they were hired ; for this reason they are called fiefs, and there are still such obligations attached to them. These estates the emperor has got by inheritance, and this is well and good in the Holy Roman Empire. But the Turk, they say, allows no inherited fiefs or principalities, landgravates or estates whatever, but fixes and gives fiefs when and to whom he will ; this is why he has such immense



amounts of gold and land, and is, in brief, master in the land, or rather a tyrant.

Now therefore the nobility need not think that they have their estates for nothing, as though they had found them or won them at play. The obligations upon them and their feudal duty show whence and why they have them, to-wit, loaned by the emperor or prince, and not that they may riot and make a display upon them but shall hold themselves armed and ready to protect the country and secure peace. If then they make much ado of having to keep horses and serve princes and lords while others have repose and peace, I say: My dear sir, get your thanks out of the fact that you have your pay and fief and are appointed to do just this thing; the pay is sufficient. And have not others labor enough with their property? Or are you the only ones who have labor? And whereas your office is seldom needed, others have to labor daily. But if thou wilt not be satisfied, and thy lot seem too hard and unequal, leave thy estate; there will be no lack of those who will be glad to take it and do in return what is expected.

#### OF WARFARE AND TILLAGE.

Therefore the wise have summed up and divided all the works of men into two divisions: tillage and warfare, which is indeed a natural division. Tillage is to provide, warfare is to protect; and those who are set aside for protection are to receive their pay and food from those who are devoted to providing, in order that they may be able to protect. On the other hand, those who provide are to be protected by those who are devoted to that office, in order that they may be able to provide. And the emperor or prince of the land is to have an eye to both offices, and take care that the protectors are armed and equipped, and that the providers do their best to improve the food. And useless people, who serve neither as protectors or providers, but who can only consume and idle and lie around, should not be tolerated, but be driven out of the country or forced to work, just as bees do, drive away the drones which do not work but steal the honey from the other bees. Therefore Solomon in Ecclesiastes calls kings tillers, who till the land. For that is really their office. But Heaven protect us Germans<sup>1</sup> from such a sudden attack of wisdom, so that we may remain a long while good consumers, and leave providing and protecting to such as like it or cannot help it!

That these thus considered may rightly receive their pay and

<sup>1</sup> It may need to be explained that this is irony.—*Tr.*

their fiefs, and do right in helping their sovereign make war and serving him therein according to their duty, is confirmed by John the Baptist. When the soldiers asked him what they should do, he answered: Be content with your wages. For if their wages had been a wrong thing or their office displeasing to God, it must be he would not have let it alone, permitted and approved it, but as a divine and Christian teacher would have condemned and prohibited them from following it. And this is the answer to those who declare from timidity of conscience (though this is now rare in people of this class), that it is dangerous to accept this office for the sake of temporal reward, inasmuch as it means nothing else than bloodshed, murder and doing one's neighbor all possible harm, as it comes in war. For these may correct their consciences to this effect, that they do not pursue this office from meddlesomeness, pleasure, nor malice, but that it is God's office and that they are under obligation to their prince and their God to follow it. Therefore, since it is a proper office and instituted by God, it deserves its reward and wages, as Christ says: The laborer is worthy of his hire.

#### OF FIGHTING FOR GAIN.

True, indeed, it is, that if any one goes to war with heart and mind set on nothing but gaining pelf, and temporal gain is his only reason, so that he is unwilling to have peace, and sorry when there is not war, he has left the right road and is the Devil's own, even if he fights under the orders and summons of his sovereign. For he is making of a good work an evil one for himself by failing to observe that he is to serve from obedience and duty, and seeking only his own. Hence he has no good conscience so that he could say: Very well, so far as I am concerned I would gladly remain at home, but because my sovereign summons and needs me I come in God's name, knowing that I am serving God, and I will earn my hire and take what is given me for my service. For a soldier ought by all means to have the consciousness and the confidence within him that he must and ought to do it, in order thus to be sure that he is serving God and that he may say: It is not I that strike, thrust, and slay here, but God and my prince whose servants my hand and powers are. This is what is meant by the watchword and battle-cry in war: Strike for the emperor! For France! For Lüneburg! For Brunswick! Thus the Jews too cried: For the Lord and for the sword of Gideon!

A man who fights from greed counteracts all his other deserts,

just as one who preaches for worldly pelf is lost ; and yet Christ says that a preacher of the Gospel deserves his food. To do anything for worldly pelf is not wrong, for dues, hire, and wages are also worldly pelf, and in this case no one would dare to work or do anything to support himself, because it is all done for the goods of this world. But to be greedy of worldly pelf and make mammon of it is wrong always in all classes, in all offices and employments. Put aside greed and other wrong aims, and warfare is no sin and thou mayest take thy wages and whatever is given thee. This is why I said above that the work in itself is good and godly, but when the person is wrong or abuses it, then it is wrong.

#### OF FIGHTING IN A WRONG CAUSE.

The second question is: How is it if my sovereign is wrong in making war? The answer is: If thou knowest for sure that he is wrong, then do thou fear God more than man, and go thou not to war nor serve, for in such a case thou canst have no good conscience before God. Yea, sayest thou, my sovereign compels me, takes my life, or will not give me my money, my wage and hire, and besides I should be despised and disgraced in the eyes of the world as a coward and deserter who left his sovereign in need, and so on. I reply: thou must take the risk, and lose for God's sake what may be lost; He can return it to thee a hundred-fold, as He has promised in the gospel: He that hath left house and home, wife and property for my sake, shall receive it a hundred-fold. And one has to be prepared for such dangers in any other affair where the authorities compel us to do wrong. But since God would have us leave father and mother for His sake, one must surely leave a sovereign for His sake.

But if thou dost not know, or canst not find out, whether thy sovereign is wrong, then do thou not relax thy uncertain obedience because of an uncertain matter of right, but believe the best of thy sovereign as love commands. For love believeth all things and thinketh no evil. Thus wilt thou be secure and act well before God. If for this thou be disgraced or called faithless, it is better that God call thee faithful and true than that the world do so. What good will it do thee if the world regarded thee as a Solomon or a Moses if God knew thee to be as wicked as Saul or Ahab?

#### OF FIGHTING FOR A FOREIGN SOVEREIGN.

The third question is: May a warrior hire himself to more than one lord, and accept wages and hire from everybody? My

answer is: I have already said that greed is bad, whether it be shown in a good office or a bad one. For though husbandry is one of the best of offices, yet is a greedy husbandman bad and condemned before God. Thus here also: it is right and proper to accept hire and to go into service, for it is right; but greed is not right, even if the year's hire were scarcely more than a florin. On the other hand: it is right in itself to take and earn pay, be it from one, two, three, or ever so many masters, provided no duty to one's prince and sovereign be neglected and the service to others is given with his knowledge and consent. For just as a good tradesman may sell his skill to whoever wants it and serve therewith, provided it do not harm his sovereign and his community, so a warrior, having from God his gift of fighting, may serve with it as being his skill and trade any one who wants it and take his pay for it as for his labor. For this too is a calling which springs from the law of love: to wit, when any one wants and needs me, to be ready and willing and to accept my dues or what is given me. For thus saith Saint Paul: What soldier serveth at his own charges?—thus approving this as right. Therefore when a prince needs and desires another prince's subject for warfare, the latter may certainly serve him with his own prince's knowledge and consent and take pay for his services.

But what if one prince or lord were making war upon another, and I were under obligation to serve both, but preferred to serve the one who was wrong because he had done me more good and favor than the one who was right and because I should profit less from the service of the latter? Here the straight brief answer is: Right, that is, pleasing God, must stand above property, life, honor, friends, favor and profit, and no individual is to be considered under such circumstances, but only God. And here again one is to endure for God's sake being despised and regarded as thankless. For there is excuse enough, namely God and right, which will not permit one to serve one's favorite and desert him who is less liked, but which on the contrary absolutely forbids this, as is right and proper. Although the old Adam may not like to hear this, yet thus must it be if indeed it is to be right at all. For we should not fight against God; yet he who fights against the right is fighting against God, who fixes, decrees and disposes all right.

#### OF FIGHTING FOR GLORY.

The fourth question is: But what shall we say of him who fights not simply for pelf, but for worldly honor, that he may be

esteemed and valued as such a valiant man, and so on? My answer is: Greed of honor and greed of gold are both greed and one as wrong as the other; whoever fights in such a vicious spirit will gain hell. For we are commanded to give and yield all honor to God, and to be satisfied with our hire and our food. Hence it is a heathen, and not a Christian, fashion to address soldiers thus before action: Comrades, soldiers! Be bold and confident; please God we will to-day win honor and grow rich! But thus and this fashion they should be addressed: Comrades! We stand here in the service and obedience of our prince, being bound by God's will and law to support our sovereign with life and property. Though in God's eyes we are wretched sinners, just as much as our enemies are, yet since we know, or know not otherwise but that our prince is right in this cause, and are thus certain that we are serving God by our service and obedience, therefore let every man be bold and fearless, and think only that his hand is God's hand, his pike God's pike, and cry with heart and voice: For God and the emperor! If God gives us the victory, the honor and praise shall be not ours but His, who accomplishes it through us poor sinners. But the spoils and the pay we will accept as given and bestowed by His divine kindness and favor upon us unworthy men, and thank Him from our hearts. Now as God will; upon them with joy!

For without doubt if we seek the honor of God and leave it to Him, as is right and proper and bound to be, more honor will come than any one could expect, for God has promised, "Whoso honors me, him will I honor; and whoso dishonors me, he shall be dishonored." Thus He is bound by this His promise: He must honor them that honor Him. And it is one of the greatest sins to seek one's own honor, since this is an infringement upon the divine prerogative. Therefore let others boast and seek honor, but be thou quiet and obedient; thy honor will take care of itself. Many a battle has been lost which would have been won had it not been for empty honor. For your honor-seeking warriors do not believe that God is present in battle and gives the victory, and hence they do not fear God; therefore they are not joyous, but rash and mad and at last are beaten.

#### OF GODLESS SOLDIERS.

But to my mind those are the most reckless fellows who before the battle encourage themselves and one another by the delectable memory of their sweethearts, and say one to another, "Hurrah now, let each man think of his sweetheart." If I had not heard



from two credible men, familiar with such practices, that this is actually done, I should never have believed that the heart of man could be so reckless and flippant in such a serious matter, when the fear of death was before his eyes. Indeed no one does it who fights alone with death, but in the ranks one incites the other, no one considering what is threatening, because it is threatening all. But it is shocking to a Christian heart to think and to hear that any one can tickle and solace himself with the thought of sensual love in the hour when the judgment of God and the fear of death are before his eyes. For those who are slain or die in this frame of mind send their souls of a surety straight to hell without any delay.

Yea, say they, if I were to take hell into consideration I should needs keep out of war. This is still more shocking, that men should deliberately put God and His judgment out of mind, and determine not to know or think or hear anything of it. This is why a great part of the soldiers go to the devil, and some of them are so full of devils that they know no better way of showing their joy than by speaking contemptuously of God and his judgment, as though it proved them to be tremendous fire-eaters to curse dreadfully, swear, torture and defy God in Heaven. They are a forlorn flock, yea chaff ; as indeed there is much chaff and little wheat in all classes.

#### OF FAITH IN LUCK

Finally, soldiers have all sorts of superstitions in battle, one commending himself to St. George, another to St. Christopher; one to this and another to that saint. Some can charm steel and flint ; some can make horse and rider fey ; some carry about them the Gospel of St. John or something else on which they depend. All such are in a dangerous state. For they do not believe in God, but on the contrary are all committing a sin against God with their unbelief and superstition, and if they should die thus they would all be lost. But thus should they do : when the battle approaches and the admonition has been made which I mentioned above, then let them simply commend themselves to the mercy of God and behave in this matter like Christians. For in that admonition is set forth merely the form in which one may go about the outward work of war with a good conscience ; but inasmuch as no good work is sufficient for salvation, every man should say or think to himself after that admonition : Heavenly Father, here am I by Thy divine will in this outward work and service of my sovereign, as is my duty, first of all to Thee and then to my sovereign for Thy sake ;



and I thank Thy grace and mercy that Thou hast placed me in this work, where I am sure that it is not sin, but right and an agreeable obedience to Thy will. But because I know and have learned from Thy gracious word that none of our works can help us, and that no one is saved as a soldier, but only as a Christian, neither will I rely upon this my obedience and work ; but I will do it freely in service to Thy will, while believing heartily that nothing but the innocent blood of Thy dear Son, my Lord Jesus Christ, can redeem and save, which He shed for me in obedience to Thy divine will. I stay by this, I live and die by this, I fight and do everything by it ; Dear Lord God and Father, keep and strengthen this belief in me by Thy spirit, Amen. If after that thou say the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, thou mayest do so, and let that be enough. Then commend body and soul into His hands, and draw and strike in God's name.

#### OF FAITH IN GOD.

If there were many such soldiers in any army, friend, who, thinkst thou, would harm them ? They would devour the world without striking a blow. Yea, if there were nine or ten such in a company, or even three or four who could say that with a good heart, I would rather have them than all your guns, pikes, horses, and armor. But friend, where are those who believe thus and can speak thus ? But though the majority do not do it, yet we must know and teach the same for the sake of those, be they ever so few, who will do it. The others, who despise the teaching that is intended for their salvation, have their judge to whom they must answer. We are excused, having done our part.